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THE POST-FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN ISLAM

FAZLUR RAHMAN

In our previous article, entitled "*Sunnah* and *Ḥadīth*", published in this Journal,[1] we treated of the emergence of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*. We underlined there the most fundamental characteristic of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* in its genesis as consisting in an effort to synthesize extremes, to stabilize and stick to the middle path. It was undoubtedly this activity that saved the Community from evaporation and, both for its consolidation and progress, it was absolutely essential that this basic impulse of *Tasannun* should remain alive. When, however, Sunnī Islam (*i.e.* the religio-political attitudes of the middle-of-the-road majority) had received an explicitly formulated content and an "orthodoxy", in a narrower sense of the term, had come into existence through the progressive formulation and elaboration of the *Ḥadīth* and the legal system (both of which went hand in hand)—as we showed in our last article—a remarkable social equilibrium and cohesion was achieved. There may have been religious societies before—and there was certainly Judaism—which achieved a tremendous degree of cohesion. But Judaism was not and is not a universal brotherhood : it is not based on any idealism, for idealism, when not universalized, becomes sheer moral mockery. Buddhism and Christianity were the two great universalistic movements, but to develop a social fabric on a positively religiously (*i.e.* idealistically) constituted basis seems to have been none of *their* concerns. Islam is the first actual movement, known to history, that has taken society seriously and history meaningfully because it perceived that the betterment of this world was not a hopeless task nor just a *pis aller* but a task in which God and man are involved together. In the post-Islamic era, it is only Communism that has expressly and systematically set out to mould history. But Communism, being an extreme form of modern Western humanism, and believing in the utterest relativism of values, substituted for the spiritual tyranny of the self-styled vicars of God, the naked tyranny of man over man. The example of Communism (the creed whose deflation is occurring before our own eyes) brings home to us the Islamic lesson that whereas the

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betterment of this world and man stands at the very centre of the Divine interest, the positive relationship between man and man—*i.e.*, society—requires the trans-human reference to God.

To revert to Islamic history. After the perfection of an elaborate theological, legal, political and social system, the equilibrium and consolidation that ensued created a tremendous effulgence in the intellectual, spiritual, scientific and generally in all the cultural fields. It is certainly not within the scope of the present study to portray the results of this cultural exuberance and creativity which it is the rightful and ardent desire of the re-awakened Muslim to re-capture. What we wish to essay in the following is to prove that although the social equilibrium achieved did bestow an extraordinary fecundity and creativity on the Muslim civilization, nevertheless, this phenomenal growth was relatively short-lived because the *content* of this structure was invested with a halo of sacredness and unchangeability since it came to be looked upon as uniquely deducible from the Qur'ān and the Prophetic *Sunnah*. The growth and flowering of Islamic culture was, therefore, stifled at its very roots and almost at the very moment when it began to blossom. This is because the actual content of the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic *Sunnah*, the content which we described in our previous articles as the "living *sunnah*", ceased to be living *sunnah i.e.*, an on-going process and came to be regarded as the unique incarnation of the Will of God.

In our previous article we described the genesis of some of the important political, theological and moral doctrines and showed how these doctrines, which had originated in the "living *sunnah*" as a product of Islamic history acting on the Qur'ān and the Prophetic *Sunnah*, were transformed, through the medium of the *Ḥadīth*, into immutable articles of Faith. Now we shall study in somewhat closer detail the workings of the same doctrine-content after it had been so transformed and what effects this had on the future of the Community. For the sake of convenience, we shall divide our enquiry into certain major fields. It should again be borne in mind that we are not attempting an exhaustive historical survey of these fields but shall confine ourselves to certain pertinent observations as to how Muslim activity in these fields affected and was affected by the doctrine-content formulated through the medium of the *Ḥadīth*.

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I
THE POLITICAL ORDER

In the previous article we briefly hinted at the causes that shaped the political attitudes of the vast body of the Muslims as distinguished from the Khārijites and the Shī'ah. Indeed, it is the emergence of these sects and their political activity, especially that of the Khārijites, that supplied Sunnism with its political content. At the outset, the Sunnīs certainly mediated between the two extremes at least at the doctrinal level. Instead of the Shī'ī legitimist claims, they successfully insisted on the *Ijmā'* of the Community and its representative chief executive, the Caliph, who was, in theory, deposable. But against the Khārijī rebellionism and, especially, in face of the actual civil wars, the Sunnīs, *i.e.* the majority of the Community, accentuated the idea of *laissez faire* and an abstention from politics. Doctrines of submissiveness to the *de facto* authority were given tremendous weight and in our last article we quoted *Ḥadīth* that advocates absolute pacifism and even total isolationism. There is little doubt that the original impulse behind all such doctrines and their protective *Ḥadīth* is the common-sense principle that *any law is better than lawlessness.* but once the doctrine was given out and accepted as guaranteed by the Prophetic authority, it became part of the permanent furniture of Sunnī belief—the Sunnīs had, for ever, become the King's Party, almost any king.

Even so, the doctrine of purely political pacifism, if it had not come to be supported by certain other powerful moral and spiritual factors, might not have resulted in a simple acceptance of political opportunism. Unfortunately, however, certain other developments took place which, in course of time, came to have the effect of advocating not only political but even moral passivity. Here we wish to draw attention specifically to the doctrine that a person who professes "there is no god but God" enters paradise "even though he commits adultery or theft". This formula, couched in the form of a very famous *Ḥadīth*[3] was, in the beginning, undoubtedly designed to provide a kind of a legal definition of a Muslim and to save the Community from dogmatic civil wars. But once it was accepted not only as a legal definition but also as a constituent of the substance of the creed, its actual effect was bound to be in favour of moral apathy, despite a good deal of *Ḥadīth* to the contrary which could, however, never revoke the

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Ḥadīth in question. The truth is that a considerable part of external solidarity of the Community was achieved at the expense of the inner density of the faith. No community can, of course, remain without the watchful guardians of its conscience, and Sunnī Islam has never been without men of acute faith and conscience, who have risked and even given their lives in protest against compromises, but the fact remains—and remains fundamentally important in the history of Islam—that a combination of a deliberately cultivated political docility and a general moral passivity not only made political opportunism possible but seemed to bestow upon it a doctrinal rectitude.

The Khārijites got themselves crushed out and obliterated for all practical purposes in a long and protracted series of open and bloody conflicts with the state and the community in general. The Shī'ah, which after its initial phase of a purely political legitimism, functioned for a time as a movement of socio-cultural protest and reform within Islam, went underground during the second and the third centuries and under suppressive pressure from without, adopted subversive tactics. When they re-emerge on the scene, especially in the form of the politically successful Ismā'īlī movement, they had become transformed beyond recognition by a theological structure at the centre of which stands the doctrine of Imamalogy—a clear and unmistakeable influence of Gnostic-Christian ideas (that had been pushed down into a subterranean life by the force of the developing Islamic ideology)—and distinguished by the isolationist doctrine of the *Taqīyah*. Instead of resuming life as a healthy criticism and a constructive opposition within the broad framework of the twin principles of *Ijtihād-Ijmā'*, Shī'ism was now pressed into quite different channels: substituting for *Ijmā'* the theoretical guidance of the infallible Imām. On the moral plane, as we shall show, Shī'ism did seek to keep certain healthier principles alive so far as the freedom and responsibility of the human will is concerned, but at the political and theological planes (which had also obvious and direct moral implications of fundamental importance), Shī'ism seemed to reach a point of no return. Indeed, one most striking fact, a fact which no Muslim caring for a genuine reconstruction of Muslim society with a progressive content can ever afford to ignore, about the religious history of Islam is that *Islam has always been subjected to extremisms, not only political but theological and moral as well.* The *Ahl*

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al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah whose very genesis had been on an assumed plea of moderation, mediation and synthesis—which is an ever ongoing process—and who, indeed, actually functioned as such a force in the early stages, themselves became, after the content of their system had fully developed, authoritarian, rigid and intolerant. Instead of continuing to be a synthesizing and absorbing force, they became transformed into a party-among-parties with all its rejecting and exclusivist attitudes.

It took time, however, for the absolutely pacifistic attitudes of Sunnism to harden. At the time of the downfall of the Umayyads and the establishment of the 'Abbāsids, the state of affairs was naturally still very liquid. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (second quarter of the second century) complains that Muslims largely suffer from political extremism, one party contending that the political authority must be upset if it disobeys God or, rather, if it seeks to implement what constitutes disobedience to God, while the other party contends that the political authority must be placed by definition, as it were, beyond criticism. Ibn al-Muqaffa' roundly dismisses the second group. With the first group he agrees that "there is no obedience (to the ruler) in disobedience of God," but he pointedly asks, if anybody is to be obeyed in righteousness, including the political authority, and if everybody is to be disobeyed, including the political authority, in what is deemed to be not-righteousness, then what is the difference between the political authority and non-authority? How can, therefore, any political authority, worthy of the name survive? Ibn al-Muqaffa', therefore, suggests that while the dictum itself is correct, it is used as a camouflage for sedition and rebellion and, further, that whatever any particular group thinks to be the correct interpretation of the obedience or disobedience to God, it seeks to impose it on others by attempting to seize the political machinery.[3]

It is to be remarked that Ibn al-Muqaffa', while stating the view of both political extremes, does not refer to any *Ḥadīth* or even alleged *Ḥadīth*, either on the side of rebellionism or absolute pacifism. And, indeed, no such *Ḥadīth* is contained either in the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Mālik or the *Āthār* of Abū Yūsuf, two eminent men of the second century. Ibn al-Muqaffa' certainly assumes that the state stands under the moral norms of Islam, but he insists that, in judging whether a particular state is so conforming or not, all contending groups must exercise

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that robust, healthy and constructive common sense which Islam did so much to inculcate and that, above all, the integrity of the Community and the stability of the state must never be lost sight of. We do not deny that pacifist *Ḥadīth* was there : indeed, our analysis of the political *Ḥadīth* in our last article has clearly shown that this *Ḥadīth* was provoked by Khārijism. What we are saying is that neither Ibn al-Muqaffa' nor Mālik nor yet Abū Yūsuf makes any reference to such *Ḥadīth*.

But the collectors of *Ḥadīth* during the third century zealously collected pacifist *Ḥadīth* and, at the political level, pacifism henceforward is permanently erected into the dogmatic structure of Islam. A Muslim, from now on, does not possess the right of political resistance—that is to say, not only actually, but even formally and theoretically. Many students of Muslim political history and theory—both Westerners and Muslim Modernists—have postulated an increasing influence on Islam of old Iranian ideas of kingship, where kings were regarded as sacred and inviolate. This story does not seem true. It is true that the political authority was vested with a quasi-inviolate character and later also expressions like "the shadow of God" are used, even by the orthodox—*e.g.*, by Ibn Taymīyah.[4] But when the orthodoxy contends that "even an unjust ruler ought to be obeyed" and that the Sulṭān is "the shadow of God," we get the apparently strange result that "even an unjust ruler is the shadow of God." Since by no stretch of imagination can this extreme construction be literally attributed to orthodoxy—least of all to a man like Ibn Taymīyah, the only meaning we can attach to the phrase "shadow of God" is that of a rallying point and a guarantee for security. And when we look at the earlier insistence of the orthodoxy, couched in *Ḥadīth* form, "to keep to the majority of the Muslims and their political authority," the meaning becomes absolutely clear. No metaphysical implications, therefore, of the old Iranian or other equivalent doctrine of rulership may be read into this dictum.

However, a closer reflection will reveal that a total conformism and pacifism, no matter through what noble purpose motivated, is completely self-defeating, for it inculcates political passivity and indifference and, subsequently, a fatal sense of suspicion against the government. And this is exactly what happened in Islam. If the maintenance of the solidarity of the Community was an overall objective—as, indeed, it was and should have been—then, to

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ensure political stability, adequate political institutions should have been erected. The *Shūrā e.g.*, could have been developed into an effective and permanent organization. But nothing like this was achieved. The '*Ulamā*' continued, on the one hand, to strenuously advocate absolute obedience (and this was their concession to realism) and, on the other, to draw perfectionist pictures of an ideal Caliph (which was of course a statement of idealism). There seemed no bridge between the two and whenever there is an unbridged (also seemingly unbridgeable) gap between the ideal and the real, cynicism, that most destructive poison for any society, is an inevitable result. Political opportunism, which, to some extent, exists in all societies, becomes, under such cynical attitudes, the hall-mark of political life.

The ground was thus prepared and justification supplied for the visitation of the Muslim world from the fourth century onward by sulṭān after sulṭān and amīr after amīr. The decrepitude of the Baghdād Caliphate was hastened. These *de facto* rulers, mostly men of tremendous initiative, ability and cynical wisdom, turned, with the help of the doctrine of pre-determinism (whose effects also we shall portray presently), the very principle which had fired the Khārijī fanaticism, upside down : "Rule belongs to God alone (*in-i'l-ḥukmu illā li'llāh*, Qur'ān VI : 57)" came to be construed as meaning that whatever political authority had come to be constituted, was so constituted through the Divine Will. Amīrs would rise with their mercenary hordes and make a clean sweep of vast territories, but the Muslims could do nothing—nothing, that is to say, religiously except to obey.

Under political opportunism, unstable rule is the order, stability a pure accident. This led to unsettled conditions. Destruction of property, especially urban property, is great during continuous political shifts and military movements. The Muslim urban life, during the later Middle Ages of Islam, was devastated. Since every new adventurer had to pay his soldiery and put some money in the treasury, people were heavily taxed, especially, in the first centuries of this type of political unsettlement, the urban population—the professional classes and more particularly the commercial classes. Ibn Khaldūn has told us how big cities could be devastated by the whirlwinds of change in despotic rule.[5] Later on, when cities could no longer support the heavy taxation, the burden had to be borne by the peasantry which was, in course of

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time, reduced to the direst poverty. It is this heavy taxation against which Shāh Walīy Allāh of Delhi also recorded his vigorous protest in the 18th century and called it anti-Islamic, since this taxation was not used for the welfare and the development of the people but to satisfy the primitive and selfish impulses of the aristocracy.

When professional classes weaken and commerce declines in the cities, the ground beneath any cultural development worthy of the name, is removed. The existence of a robust middle class is absolutely essential for any cultural development—spiritual, intellectual or artistic. We do not, of course, say that the political instability described above and unwittingly though indirectly supported by the religious attitudes inculcated by the orthodoxy, was the only reason for the deterioration of the Islamic civilization. But we do say that it was both an extremely important factor and a major symptom of deterioration. The middle class that was produced by the equilibrium achieved after the first two centuries or so resulted in a brilliant civilization at all levels. It was intellectually and scientifically the torch-bearer of humanity ; in arts its effulgence produced unrivalled masterpieces, especially in architecture and poetry : and in religious leadership, of course, it was unique. But this extraordinary creativity could not be sustained for a long enough time with a strong enough impetus to take deeper roots in society.

In political theory, then, the orthodoxy, of the two political extremes, adopted the extreme of absolute obedience and conformism. (This does not and need not deny the fact that some exceptional religious leaders sometimes courageously withstood what they considered to be unrighteous commands of rulers). This it did originally to preserve the integrity and safety of the Community. But the doctrine has been retained as a feature of orthodoxy even until to-day, long after the original needs have passed and even forgotten by the orthodoxy itself. That is to say, *a genuine historical need was erected into a kind of dogma*, with serious results for the politico-social ethic of the Muslim society in the later Middle Ages, where it encouraged political opportunism on the one hand and generally inculcated political apathy among the people on the other. *What is imperatively required is a healthy interest in the state and a constructive criticism of the government affairs, keeping in view the over-riding need of the integrity of the Community and the stability of the state.*

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II

THE MORAL PRINCIPLES

The same story is repeated at the moral plane on the fundamental question of human freedom and accountability. The Qur'ān and the Prophet's behaviour had provided an adequate framework to ensure (*i*) the maximum of creative human energy and (*ii*) the keeping of this human creativity on the right moral track. The Qur'ān vividly and forcefully emphasized all those tensions that are necessary for this purpose. It severely warned against those nihilist trends which lead man to regard himself as law unto himself and are summed up in the pregnant term "*takabbur*" and called upon him to submit himself to the moral law. On the other hand, it raised genuine optimism to the maximum, condemned hopelessness as one of the gravest errors, charged man with limitless potentialities and made him squarely responsible for discharging this "trust". The Qur'ān is not interested in a discussion of the problem of the "freedom of the human will" or "determinism" but, on the basis of a true appreciation of the human nature, in releasing to the maximum the creative moral energy of man. The Prophet, in his deeds and sayings, was an actual paradigm of this attitude and the response he evoked from his Companions was nothing essentially otherwise.

About a century, however, after the Prophet's death, this practical moral bent gave way to fierce speculation on the problem. Every religion has, at some stage, to formulate theologically its implicit world-view, but unfortunately in the intellectual developments in Islam during the second and the third centuries a situation was created where each of the two major contending groups—the Mu'tazilah and their opponents—found themselves developing in the abstract only one term of the concrete moral tension strongly advocated by the Qur'ān. In order to raise the moral creativity of men, the Qur'ān had emphasized the potentialities and the accountability of man—and the strict justice of God. The Mu'tazilah asserted this point and this point only, so that they became irretrievable prisoners of their own position. But in order to assert the absolute supremacy of the moral law, the Qur'ān had equally emphatically stressed the power, will and majesty of God. The religious opponents of the Mu'tazilah, in whose eyes the latter were denuding God of all godhead and substituting a naked humanism for the essentials of religion, in their turn, accentuated the will and

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power of God only, so much so that they became mortgaged to this doctrine totally and irrevocably and, in course of time, erected determinism into an unalterable part of the orthodox creed. The "orthodoxy" was thus once again manoeuvered into an extreme position. In place of the living, concrete and synthetic moral tension of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic *Sunnah* we have again a conflict of pure and naked extremes. What the "orthodoxy" did was essentially to take the latter of these two extremes and instal it into its dogmatic structure. Or, rather, the "orthodoxy" came into existence on the very plea and with the very programme of installing the omnipotence of God and impotence of man into a dogma.

In our previous article we have drawn attention to the pre-deterministic *Ḥadīth* of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* and also to the opposite *Ḥadīth* and have pointed out the terrific preponderance of the former over the latter. We also briefly hinted at the situation that forced such a formulation of *Ḥadīth*. This is not the place to trace the origin and development of this problem in Islam but, as we said in our last article, its beginnings are connected with the problem of how faith is related to acts and with the definition of a Muslim. The Umayyad state had favoured determinism, for they feared that a stress on human freedom and initiative might unseat them. The doctrine that faith must be regarded as essentially independent of acts and that acts must be judged leniently also well suited an attitude of mind that favoured determinism. The doctrine of the essential independence of faith vis-à-vis acts was regarded by the majority of the Community as a necessary defence against Khārijism and was adopted in a modified form. In itself, this doctrine was harmless, indeed, necessary provided it was fully understood that it was designed to provide only an external, legal definition of a Muslim and did not describe the content of Islam as such. This unfortunately was not kept in view and the doctrine of the independence of faith of works was allowed to become not merely a formal but a *real* definition of a Muslim. This was undoubtedly the result of exasperation against Khārijism and other internal disputes, but it was an extreme and, in the long run, a morally suicidal measure : it was almost an exact Muslim replica of the Christian doctrine of "Justification by Faith".

This attitude of mind was bound to result in an undue easing of the religious conscience which obviously lowers the moral

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tension and proportionately the moral standards. Undoubtedly, there is much other *Ḥadīth* that seeks to establish a positive relationship between faith and acts, between the inner state of the moral agent and its outward expression, and in the previous article we have also cited such *Ḥadīth*. But the kind of function that the first type of *Ḥadīth* was called upon to perform was definitive and, as we have just observed, its defining character was not only formal and external and, therefore, purely legal but came to be regarded as *essential*, *i.e.*, it defined the essence of Islam. Its very status, therefore, conferred upon it an incorrigibility *i.e.*, an inherent capacity for not being effectively counteracted, no matter how much emphasis is laid on the opposite, complimentary point of view, which was undoubtedly done.

But this was not all. For the orthodoxy, as we have just seen, was also compelled by the actual situation created by the Khawārij and the Mu'tazilah, especially the latter, to assert uncompromisingly the will and power of God in a way where they felt duty-bound to rob man of all potency. As recent historical research has revealed, the Mu'tazilah were a group of Muslim intellectuals who, in an arena of great ideological conflict in the Middle East in the early centuries of Islam, had successfully defended Islam against Gnosticism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. They were no mere intellectual idlers. One of the weapons with which they had defended Islam was the doctrine of human free-will and responsibility. This doctrine they had undoubtedly derived from the Qur'ān and had then sought to formulate it in terms of the current stock of philosophical ideas of Greek origin. Their intellectual tools were, however, not sufficient (any more than were those of people they were opposing outside Islam). In their actual formulations, therefore, they came to express human freedom in a way which smacked of being clearly humanistic and seemed to rob God of His godhead.

But the solution proposed and finally adopted by the orthodoxy suffered from the same disadvantage. It represented the other extreme, and when combined with the orthodox position on the question of the relationship of faith and behaviour outlined above, it constituted a terribly powerful bulwark against the spiritual-moral attitude behind human initiative and creativity. Whereas in the hands of Ibn Ḥanbal the emphasis on the power and majesty of God was a simple assertion of the religious impulse,

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the later theologians like al-Ash'arī', al-Māturīdī and especially their successors transformed it into a full-fledged theological doctrine. But their intellectual tools were no better than those of the Mu'tazilah and thus the doctrine developed one-sidedly in favour of determinism. A little later, during the fourth and the fifth centuries, the Muslim philosophers, being pure rationalists, developed determinism still further and, by an identification of causal, rational and theistic forms of determinism, produced a truly imposing deterministic structure of the universe—and of man.

The theologians, who were otherwise opposed to the teachings of the philosophers, were nevertheless not slow in availing themselves of the vast arsenal of the philosophical stock of ideas in favour of determinism, the only element rejected by them in this connection being rationalism. During the sixth century, the famous and influential theologian, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606) was a theistic predestinarian of a truly frightening order. For the sake of illustration, we may note here one of his highly skilful arguments advanced against human potency. He argues[6] that in order to be able to act, the would-be agent must know exactly what he is doing ; otherwise he cannot be said to 'act'. But in order to know exactly what I am doing, *e.g.*, when I am said to move my finger, I must know the consequences of this act. But when I move my finger, an infinite series of motions is initiated (both in my body and outside it) which I can never *possibly* know. I cannot, therefore, be said even to be able to move my finger. The motion of my finger is, therefore, an event which is created by God, or, rather, God had created it in eternity in His infinite Wisdom and Knowledge.

Most Ṣūfī theosophs carried the doctrine to much greater lengths and, in fact, transformed it completely under their utterly monistic world-view : instead of saying, "Every act or occurrence is created by God", they ended up by saying, "Every act or occurrence is God" through the intermediate statement, "Every act or occurrence is a manifestation of God". Not only was there no agent besides God, there was *just nothing* besides Him. The effects of this development on the moral texture of the Community we shall deal with a little more fully in the next section. The fact is that the chief property of the spiritual and intellectual life of the Muslims approximately from the seventh century onward is fatalism and the moral-psychological attitude that goes with it. We do not

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deny the obvious fact that the Muslim normally went on working for his living—*e.g.*, a peasant tilled his land and did not sit down in the conviction that if God had pre-written that his crop should grow then he had to do nothing. But what we do say is, and this is, surely, the problem here at the practical level, that the Muslim's initiative, intellectually and physically, became severely proscribed until it was almost numbed.

Thus, we see once again that a particular extreme solution, designed for a particular extreme ailment at a particular juncture of Islamic religious history, became a permanent feature of the orthodox content of Islam, and, further, that this extreme solution became extremer and extremer as century after century passed. Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728), in his critique of Muslim extremists on this very point wrote :

> "It ought to be known that on this point many groups of theologians and Ṣūfīs have erred and have adopted a position which is, actually, worse than that of the Mu'tazilah and other upholders of the freedom of the will (which the theologians and Ṣūfīs had sought to remedy). For, the upholders of the freedom of the will (at least) emphasize the Command (of God *i.e.* the moral imperative)....and command good and forbid evil. But they were misled on the question of Divine Omnipotence and thought that the affirmation of a Universal Divine Will and Power...would rob God of Justice and Wisdom—but they were mistaken. These were then confronted by a number of '*Ulamā*' (*i.e.* of the orthodoxy), pious men and theologians and Ṣūfīs who affirmed the absolute Power of God...which was so far so good. But they let go the side of command and prohibition (*i.e.* the moral side)...and became like those Associationists (*mushrikūn*) who (as the Qur'ān informs us) told the Prophet 'If God had so willed, we would not have committed *shirk*...' Therefore, although the Mu'tazilah did resemble the Zoroastrians in so far as they affirmed an agent other than God for what they believed to be evil this other group resembled the Associationists (*mushrikūn*), who are much worse than the Zoroastrians."[7]

The two great reformers of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī of 17th century and Shāh Walīy Allāh of the eighteenth century, also made this a fundamental point in their attempts at a reconstruction of the spiritual and moral foundations of the Community. Since, however, their endeavours on the problem are related to Ṣūfistic background, we shall speak of them in the following section. But despite the influential voice of these reformers who were opposed in their own times—Ibn Taymīyah (who died in prison) and Sirhindī (who almost died in prison)

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having been especially bitterly opposed—it is abundantly evident from the foregoing brief sketch that the doctrine of predestination has been the rule in our life, the opposite has been the exception and the weight of this doctrine has been so great in all its manifestations that it has undoubtedly numbed the initiative of the community as a whole. Apart from the Khārijites and the Mu'tazilah, both of which groups became extinct in Islamic history, the Shī'ah were the only major group that insisted on freedom of the human will in its creed. But this item of creed has been rendered practically ineffectual and defunct in Shī'ism itself because Shī'ism completely disregarded the majority of the Community and chose to develop on its own lines and also because freedom of the will is rather pointless in an authoritarian system of Imāmalogy and alongside of the doctrine of *Taqīyah*.

III

SPIRITUAL LIFE : ṢŪFISM

We are not here concerned with the history of Ṣūfism, much less with the entire content of Ṣufī thought and practice but only with certain of its major features as they stand related to our present argument. This argument as it has built up so far says (1) that in order to face certain particular historical exigencies of an extreme nature, our orthodoxy was led, during its early, formative phase, to adopt certain more or less extreme remedial measures ; but (2) that, since the door of re-thinking (*Ijtihād*) was closed after this period, these early measures became part of the permanent content of our orthodox structure. We have endeavoured to demonstrate that in the politico-social sphere and, more particularly at the moral plane, the combined effects of some of the doctrines regarded as fundamental by our orthodoxy did have, and could not fail to have disastrous consequences for the moral constitution of the Community ; its political attitude was a strong contributory cause of inducing political cynicism which is so patently evident in our political life ; its moral emphases could lead only to pessimism. Where cynicism and pessimism are allowed to grow, life itself revolts and seeks other avenues of self-expression and self-fulfilment —healthy or not-so-healthy. We shall now briefly try to establish two points (*a*) that Ṣūfism, in the beginning, was a moral-spiritual protest against certain developments of politico-doctrinal nature within the Community ; but (*b*) that after things ossified in the

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manner described above, Ṣūfism took over as a movement of popular religion and from the sixth-seventh centuries (twelfth-thirteenth centuries of the Christian era) established itself with its peculiar ethos *not only as a religion within religion but as a religion above religion.*

It must be repeated that we are not here concerned with analysing the content of Ṣūfism historically and tracing its elements to foreign sources. We need not deny and, indeed, we are convinced that the Ṣūfī movement came under certain fundamental influences from without, especially in its later stages of development. Nor is this in itself bad: every movement assimilates elements that come its way in the course of its expansion. But we are here concerned strictly with a functional enquiry: the overall build-up, operation and legacy of Ṣūfism within Islam.

That among the Companions of the Prophet there must have been those whose natural bent of mind was more towards contemplation and introversion should, we submit, be accepted even though later Ṣūfī assertions about Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Abū Hurayrah and others may not be acceptable as historical truth. But the emphasis of such Companions on inner life and devotion could not have constituted a "way of life" independent of the society-building ethos of the Community at large—on the contrary, it must have helped deepen the moral consciousness involved in that ethos, as, ideed, was the case pre-eminently with the Prophet himself whose religious experience itself issued out in the form of the Islamic movement. It would be a simple oddity to attribute to any one of the Companions anything like, say, the ecstasies of an Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī or the theosophic lyrics of an Ibn 'Arabī. But a little later a vigorous movement of asceticism gets under way and is in full swing during the second century. The great name of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is also associated with it. It is essentially a moral movement, emphasizing and re-emphasizing the interiorization, deepening and purification of the moral motive and warning man of the awful responsibility that life lays on his shoulders. On the face of it, there is nothing wrong with this for the Qur'ān and the Prophet fully support it. But unfortunately as this movement proceeded, it exhibited all the symptoms of an *extreme reaction.* It developed a one-sided *Zuhd*, an excessive pre-occupation with world-negation, an unintegrated spirituality and then gradually a formal system of moral gymnastics. This certainly could not be supported by, indeed

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it ran directly counter to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. For the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* had called upon Muslims to forego comfort and, if necessary, property "in the Path of Allāh" *i.e.* to build something higher and positive—a socio-moral order. But the new *Zuhd* taught the Muslim not to possess anything; you obviously cannot forego or spend anything which you do not possess. As for the "Path of Allāh", its Ṣūfī interpretation soon unfolded itself as we shall presently see. What had happened?

It seems that this phenomenon can be adequately understood only as a severe and extreme reaction to certain developments within Islam. The first of these developments is the breakdown of effective political leadership and authority after 'Alī, when, under chaotic conditions, the early Umayyads, the Khawārij, the Shī'ah, the partisans of 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr and others put forward their warring claims. The most important positive idea that took birth at this juncture was that of the "integral Community" or *Jamā'ah* which we discussed in our last article. But another strong sentiment that asserted itself and inadvertently sought to negate the very idea of *Jamā'ah* is emphatically individualistic and isolationist in character. We also alluded to this in the last article and pointed to the considerable isolationist *Ḥadīth* that came into circulation in this connection—*Ḥadīth* that asks every individual to "mind his own business" and not to "take part in the affairs of the public," *i.e.* politics and government. We especially recall in this connection a *Ḥadīth* we quoted from al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* recommending retirement to a mountain-pass and "leaving people alone". Indeed, the entire body of that *Ḥadīth* which lies commonly diffused in our *Ḥadīth* Collections and which, in slightly varying forms of language, defines a Muslim as "one from whose tongue and hands other Muslims are safe" is rooted in this very back-ground of unbridled and irresponsible politics and civil wars. Sensitive spirits could not have remained unaffected by these conditions; but the way they reacted was the advocacy of a withdrawal of the soul inward from the external world, after an initial period of puritanism and asceticism. That there were already in the Middle East equivalent attitudes spread by other religions—notably Christianity and Buddhism—and that influences from these must have come into Islam at some stage, must be accepted. The problem, however, is: What prepared certain circles among the Muslims to accept such an attitude to life *despite* the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*? Nor

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is this question really answered by stating what is essentially true, *viz.* that many of the new converts in the Fertile Crescent became Muslims more or less externally only and that inwardly they were either unable or unwilling to shed their previous spiritual make-up. For the question remains: Why were these converts or their progenies even later not consolidated into a genuinely Islamic attitude to life ?—on the contrary, the world-denying spirit becomes stronger with the passage of time.

Out of the failure of political life to meet adequately the proper inner aspirations of the people, Messianism developed rapidly in Islam. In one form, these Messianic hopes simply took over the doctrine of the "Second Advent" of Jesus, from Christianity. The orthodoxy in course of time adopted it. In another form, which seems to have taken birth in Shī'ī circles but came into Sunnism through the activity of early Ṣūfis, these millennial aspirations are expressed in the doctrine of the Mahdī—the figure who will finally effect the victory of justice and Islam over tyranny and injustice. That this doctrine came into Islam through the Ṣūfis is made certain by the fact that the beginnings of Ṣūfism are clearly connected with the early popular preachers —known by various names—who used Messianism in their sermons to satisfy the politically disillusioned and morally starved masses. In the beginning, the two doctrines—that of the re-appearance of Jesus and that of the Mahdī—are quite distinct, since their historical sources are quite different, but later the two figures are brought together, although not entirely successfully.

What is important for us at present is the effect of this Messianism on the general morale of the Community. Of course Messianism is itself the result of a low pitch of morale as *e.g.* was the case with the Jews during their exile. But once accepted strictly, it accentuates hopelessness. Combined with other moral and material factors described before, it is exactly this hopelessness that was perpetuated by Messianism in Islam. What it really amounts to is that history is declared to be irredeemable and a kind of hope or rather consolation is developed about something (the Mahdī or the Messiah) which although it pretends to be historical, has, nevertheless nothing to do with history but in reality with what might be called "trans-history". That is to say, what really matters is the *consolation* itself and not any historical fact. It is both interesting and highly instructive to note in this connection that

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in order to make room for a Messianic figure the earlier materials of *Ḥadīth* itself were forced in a new direction. In our last article we have discussed a *Ḥadīth* about *Ijmā'* quoted by al-Shāfi'ī according to which the Prophet said, "Honour my Companions, then those who follow them and then those who follow these latter. Then falsehood will spread..." As we commented upon this *Ḥadīth*, this is a clear attempt at declaring religiously authoritative the results of the activity of the first three generations of the Muslims—the Companions, the "Successors" and the "Successors of the Successors." Now, this *Ḥadīth* does not contain the slightest hint about Messianism. Later, however, other versions of the same *Ḥadīth* become current, e.g. "The best generation is mine (*khayr al-qurūni qarnī*), then those who follow them.....etc." These are then given a decidedly Messianic twist. This is because it must be accepted that history is going, and is bound to go, from bad to worse and is, indeed, doomed, if a Messiah is to come.

But Ṣūfism could not remain content even with a "trans-historic" event when this became part of common doctrine. It enacted yet a different piece, this time not a trans-historic one but a purely spiritual, meta-historic one. It constructed an invisible hierarchy of "averting" saints with the "Pole"(*Quṭb*) at its pinnacle. But for this ever-present hierarchy, it taught, the whole universe would collapse. Again, we do not know exactly whether Shī'ism influenced Ṣūfism or vice-versa, but we do know that about the same time the Shī'ī concept of the "absent (*ghā'ib*) Imām" was being transformed theologically into that of a "hidden power" as opposed to the actual, visible political power which was in the hands of the Sunnīs. This transformation was effected by extremer Shī'ī sects. But in whichever direction the influence lay, it is quite obvious that Ṣūfism, through this doctrine, was effecting the withdrawal of the soul from the external world to an invisible realm, this withdrawal being not merely at the individual but at the collective level. This doctrine too, although it was never officially accepted by the orthodoxy, gained wide recognition not only from the masses but even at the hands of the *'Ulamā'* as the *'Ulamā'* slowly became helpless against, and began to succumb to, Ṣūfism.

This problem of the mutual relationship between the *'Ulamā'* and their activity on the one hand and the forces represented by the Ṣūfīs on the other was the second fundamental factor, besides the political developments, in providing the real impetus to Ṣūfism.

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Islam, as a texture of moral-social life, demanded its formulation in legal terms. The Prophet and the early leaders of Islam had laid the foundations of a legal pattern but the working-out of this pattern into a system was achieved only later. Achieved it had to be, for the vastly increased needs of administration after expansion imperatively demanded this ; and, in fact, the legal system of Islam was the first Islamic discipline to mature. But many people, to whom the inwardness and personalization of religion appeared as the very soul of religion, looked askance at this impersonal legal structure as an adequate expression of Islam. The lawyers, of course, had made every effort to keep the moral impulse alive in the law, so much so that a modern Western scholar has described this law as a "discussion on the duties of Muslims."[8] Nevertheless, law can regulate only the "externals". Who shall be the guardian of the inner tribunal of conscience in man, if the *Ulamā*'s task was mainly to give legal decisions ? The Ṣūfīs claimed to be precisely such people.

The '*Ulamā*' were naturally suspicious of this claim, for the guardianship of the conscience or the "heart", they rightly insisted, was not a matter open to inspection, and they warned against such an exclusive doctorship of the soul. But it is equally true that the '*Ulamā*' failed to diagnose the real source of strength behind the Ṣūfī protests and claims ; they ought to have attempted to integrate into the orthodox structure itself what Ṣūfism fundamentally stood for—the life of the heart insofar as it makes human personality truly moral. The '*Ulamā*' did not do so, but it was probably under their and similar criticisms of the utter privacy and lawlessness of the early Ṣūfī procedure that the Ṣūfīs began to systematize their experiences in terms of what are called "Stations (*Maqāmāt)*" ; a moral-spiritual itinerary of the soul beginning usually with "repentance (*Tawbah)*" which in Ṣūfī terminology means renunciation of the world. But the Ṣūfī method did not remain purely moral for long but gradually became submerged under the ideal of ecstasy and the results were not just moral purification but rather tall Ṣūfī claims which became very frequent and improper and were called "*Sh*aṭaḥāt". These indeed, ran exactly counter to the very ideal of moral purification and, in fact, one of the great representatives of the Ṣūfī movement known as al-Ḥallāj (*i.e.* a wool-carder) had to pay with his life at the beginning of the fourth century.

The '*Ulamā*' certainly could not be expected to share *this*

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particular goal of the Ṣūfīs—an ecstatic obliteration of the self. But things did not stop there. Soon after the *Fiqh* systems, the Muslims developed the science of *Kalām* or theology as a necessary weapon to defend Islam on the arena of warring ideologies. Exactly as a parallel to this, the Ṣūfīs now claimed not only an inner path of "purification" or even ecstasy but a unique way of inner knowledge, a gnose-*ma'rifah*, which they radically opposed to the reason of the rationalists and the *'ilm* of the *'Ulamā'*, this latter being bound up in form with the former. The *'Ulamā'* again failed to recognize the genuine element in the Ṣūfī claim. They rightly pointed out that the Ṣūfī *Ma'rifah* was condemned to privacy and that each man's *Ma'rifah* would be his own. But what was needed was an adequate frame-work which would rehabilitate the Ṣūfī "intuition" into reason by bringing out the true nature of the latter as both perceptive and formulative. In this way, the Ṣūfī "intuition" should have been made chargeable with publicity, so to say, and accountable to true reason, as must be the case in the nature of things.

As it was, however, the *'Ulamā'* failed to do so, while the attempts of some of the sober and orthodox Ṣūfīs to devise a set of antithetical and complementary categories[9] to do justice both to the fact of inner experience and its outward testing and formulation did not actually prove adequate and did not bear much fruit until a person of the originality and perception of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1035/1625) appeared. By that time a terrible fundamental damage had already been done. But before things came to this pass, Islam had witnessed a profound attempt at reformation and integration of the spiritual and the formal elements in Muslim life, an attempt which truly activated, for a time, the forces of inner regeneration in the Muslim Community. This was the work of al-Ghazālī (d. 606/1111). He told the *'Ulamā'* in clear terms that, unless reinvested with fresh meaning, their theology and law—although to be respected—must remain an empty shell; on the other hand, he forcefully tried to bring home to the Ṣūfī that his experiences could not be allowed to wander and that the content of these experiences must submit to a test other than the experience itself, viz. the values of Islam.

But barely a century after al-Ghazālī, about the time when Ṣūfism becomes a mass phenomenon, Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and after him his followers, develop a doctrine that is out-and-out pantheistic

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and issue it in the name of mystic intuition. As we have also pointed out in another place,[10] this theosophic Ṣūfism was nothing more or less than pure philosophy masquerading under the name of Ṣūfism—a movement which had begun with the ideal of moral edification. The fact is that philosophy, after it had been attacked by al-Ghazālī, went underground and reappeared in the name of theosophic intuitionism. The pantheistic content of this theosophy apart, the greatest disservice that it did to the intellectual life of the Community was the sharp cleavage it made between what it called "Reason" and "*Kashf*" and claimed the latter for itself in order to seek security under its supposedly unassailable citadel whereas "Reason" was declared to be absolutely fallible. Now, whenever the organic relationship between perceptive and formulative reason is thus cut in a society, it can never hope to keep alive any intellectual tradition of a high calibre.

As for the doctrine of pantheism, there can be no doubt about its nihilistic effects upon the moral tension of the ego. So long as pantheism remains a purely intellectual affair, it does not matter very much religiously; and at the intellectual level it may be opposed by other theories. But once it grips the moral fibre of a society—as it did affect the Ṣūfīs generally in the later Muslim Middle Ages and, through them, the masses—it cannot fail to sap it. When one sings with 'Irāqī:

'When He divulged His secret Himself
Why should He blame poor 'Irāqī ?'[11]

or says with the formulator of the famous aphorism: 'He Himself is the jug, Himself the jug-maker, and Himself the jug-clay', (خود کوزه و خود کوزه گر و خود گل کوزه) one has given up the very idea of the moral struggle and cannot but proclaim, and proclaim seriously with all its consequences, "All is He (*hamah ūst*)".

It is against this moral degeneration originating from pantheism that certain valiant spirits fought with a considerable and increasing success among the educated classes of Muslims from Ibn Taymīyah in the fourteenth century to Muḥammad Iqbāl in the twentieth. Ibn Taymīyah's virulent campaign against pantheistic Ṣūfism is well-known. although it is a serious error,[12] commonly committed, to regard him as an enemy of all expressions of Ṣūfism. But the most brilliant analysis of the various types of pantheism and its most acute criticism from an ethical standpoint was the achievement of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (*Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thānī*). His

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work demonstrates, through a genuine dialectic of religious experience, the true organic nature of the inner experience and the reality of the external world, necessitating a subsumption of the former to the latter, of the intuitive perception to the moral order. Sirhindī thereby proved the supreme status of *Sharī'ah*—the moral command of God. A century and a half later, Shāh Walīy Allāh of Delhi gave a new solution by accepting the premises of Ibn 'Arabī but by re-instating at the same time the full reality of the moral order *within this framework*.[13]

Despite the efforts of these few outstanding personalities, however, Ṣūfism, as a vehement expression of popular religion, has reigned supreme in Islam. The truth is that since the twelfth century—since the establishment of the popular Ṣūfī orders or *Tarīqahs*—mass religion, surcharged with primitive emotionalism, expressing itself through systematic techniques of suggestion and auto-suggestion and both supporting and supported by veritable congeries of superstitions, swamped Islam from the one end of the world to the other. Where is the effort to build a moral-social order on earth—the unmistakable stand of pristine Islam? Instead, we have the Shaykh and his authority, an endless mythology of saints, miracles, and tombs, hypnotization and self-hypnotization and, indeed, crass charlatanism and sheer exploitation of the poor and the ignorant.

Ṣūfism, at bottom, undoubtedly speaks to certain fundamental religious needs of man. What is required is to discern these necessary elements, to disentangle them from the emotional and sociological *débris* and to re-integrate them into a uniform, "integral" Islam. Since *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'*—the effective framework of Islamic thinking came to an early stop, the inner integrity of Islam was destroyed, each element forcing its own way out in a direction it pleased or happened to take and thus parallel, indeed mutually opposed "Islams" developed throughout the later centuries. We have briefly seen above the main course that Ṣufistic Islam took and why. We shall next discuss the philosophical movement and the system of education and then attempt to draw certain overall conclusions.

NOTES

1. *Islamic Studies*, vol. I, No. 2, pp. 1-36.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
3. Ibn al-Muqaffa', *R. fi'l-Ṣaḥābah* in Rasā'il al-Bulaghā', Cairo, 1951, pp. 120-21.

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4. For example, in his *al-Siyāsah al-Sharʿiyyah*, Cairo 1951, p. 173, where the statement, 'the political authority (*sulṭān*) is the shadow of God on earth' is even given as a *Ḥadīth* which becomes current in later centuries. Ibn Taymīyah follows this up with the quotation, "sixty years of an unjust ruler are better than one night without any political authority".
5. *Muqaddimah*; see Section (*Faṣl*) IV of the First Book on the Formation and Destruction of Cities; see also Section II (in M. Quatremère's edition, vol. I., p. 270), where Ibn Khaldūn describes how city-life decays under uncouth and specially bedouin rulers.
6. Al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Hyderabad, 1353 A.H., p. 230 ff. A little earlier on the same page an interesting argument of the Muʿtazilī Abu'l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī for the opposite thesis of freedom, based on direct self-consciousness, is given.
7. *R. fi'l-amr wa'l-irādah* in *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā*, vol. I, Cairo, 1323 A.H., p. 334 l. 13, p. 335, l.6.
8. Gibb, H.A.R., *Mohammedanism*, Menter Publications, p. 80 (bottom) and p. 81, l. 5. The judgement in quotation marks given there comes from Snouck Hurgronje.
9. These categories are "*Unity-and-Plurality*"; "Sobriety-and-Intoxication (*Saḥw wa Sukr*)", "Presence-and-Absence (*Ḥuḍūr wa Ghaybah*)", etc. See a discussion of these in the *Introduction* to my forthcoming book "*The Selected Letters of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī*," being published by the Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi.
10. The forthcoming volume entitled "*Islam*" (in the Weidenfeld and Nicolson Series "History of Religion"), Chapter VII.
11. A famous *ghazal* of 'Irāqī ends with this verse:—

چو خود کردند راز خویشتن فاش عراقی را چرا بدنام کردند؟

12. See his *al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā*, vol. II, p. 97.
13. See e.g. his *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*, vol. I, the chapter entitled "*Inshiqāq al-Taklīf min al-Taqdīr*", *i.e.* "How obligation flows from Determinism". This, however, must be brought into relation with his other writings *based on monistic* principles.

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